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SUBJECT: UN Coordination Meeting with GOZ and Donors

1. Summary. On September 15th, the UN held its first coordination meeting on the humanitarian crisis, after a hiatus of many months, with the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) and donors. Overall, despite the GOZ's attempt to try and reassure the donors and encourage them to respond favorably to the humanitarian appeal, the meeting was not useful in addressing the concerns donors have raised regarding the apparent attempts by the GOZ to exert greater control over the international food relief process. End Summary.

2. On September 15th, UN Resident Representative, Victor Angelo, called the first coordination meeting on the humanitarian crisis, after a hiatus of many months. The meeting was held at the request of the GOZ. In attendance were more than 50 persons, including representatives of the GOZ, donor countries, UN agencies and a select group of NGOs. July Moyo, the Minister of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare, headed the GOZ delegation. After introductory remarks by Victor Angelo noting that both the GOZ appeal and the UN's Consolidated Appeal have been formally issued and stressing the need to discuss the different sectors covered in the appeal, Angelo turned the floor over to Minister Moyo.

3. Moyo began by summarizing the GOZ's appeal, which covers food, non-food (health, HIV/AIDS) and agricultural recovery assistance. Moyo emphasized that the lessons learned from last year highlighted the need for improved coordination among the GOZ, the UN agencies, donors and NGOs in responding to the humanitarian crisis. Moyo acknowledged that donors had expressed concerns over the GOZ's recently issued "Policy on Operations of Non-Governmental Organisations in Humanitarian and Development Assistance in Zimbabwe." He stated that the policy was intended to be a statement of lessons learned and not designed to change the existing procedures and practices, but expressed his willingness to respond to questions and provide further explanations. Moyo also stated that the GOZ was willing to continue these coordination meetings as frequently as every two weeks, if acceptable to the UN and donors, in order to further coordination.

4. When the floor was opened for questioning, Ambassador Sullivan began by expressing the broad donor concern that the GOZ's policy was being taken by officials at local levels as a significant change from the beneficiary selection and food distribution procedures that had worked effectively over the past year. Sullivan stressed the need for the GOZ to communicate publicly and in writing to all levels of government that the past procedures would continue unaffected and the role of NGOs in the beneficiary selection and food distribution process would remain unchanged. The Canadian Charge asked about the status of the MOU being negotiated between the GOZ and WFP, and specifically inquired whether the MOU or the GOZ's policy would take precedence in the event of a conflict. The Dutch Charge asked about the rationale behind the GOZ's closure of the field offices of the UN's Relief and Recovery Unit (RRU), and when such offices might be reopened.

5. In addressing these inquiries, Minister Moyo did not

specifically respond to the comment about the need for a public written statement from the GOZ. Rather, Moyo only provided general assurances to the assembled donors that nothing in the GOZ's documents suggests that the role of NGOs would be different than last year. Moyo promised that if any problems or misinterpretations arise, the GOZ would deal with them on the ground swiftly. Moyo also stated that he will personally be travelling around the country, primarily to discuss the GOZ's agricultural input scheme, but he will "clarify" the policy to local structures. Regarding the question about precedence between the WFP MOU and the GOZ's policy, Moyo effectively avoided the issue, explaining in general terms that many things take precedence over policy in light of the legal framework the GOZ operates under. Concerning the RRU offices, once again, Moyo declined to address the specific issue. He responded that the issue of monitoring food distribution by the RRU had been raised by the UN Special Envoy, James Morris, with President Mugabe and, therefore, is a matter of foreign affairs which should properly be addressed to the Foreign Ministry.

16. Comment. The NGO policy was clearly another attempt by a beleaguered government to exert increased control over international humanitarian assistance resources. The donor response was swift and emphatic, with WFP reporting no new aid pledges since August 14th, the date the policy was launched. The government's request for this meeting suggests its concern over the negative impact on the international response to its aid appeal. Despite Minister Moyo's best effort to assuage donor concerns, however, his failure to adequately address the major issues raised at the meeting was largely self-defeating, leaving continuing unease within the donor community. Because donors have maintained a united stance opposing the GOZ's attempt to usurp control over food aid resources, distributions on the ground have been implemented with virtually no change. Nonetheless, the GOZ is clearly resisting pressure to publicly retract its policy statement. Post will continue to monitor events closely and report on any incidents that might impact on our on-going food relief program in Zimbabwe. Until the issues in country are finally resolved, it is important for USAID/FFP to refrain from making any new pledges of food assistance without prior concurrence from post. Sullivan